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FOUR WOMEN DANCING
By Zoan Andrea (School of Mantegna)
Gift of The Print Club

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EARLY ITALIAN ENGRAVINGS

During the month of April in the Gallery of Prints there will be a truly remarkable lot of fifteenth century Italian engravings and a few drawings of that time. These are mostly from the collection of Paul J. Sachs of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.¹ Some dozen prints of Mantegna and his school however have been loaned by Ralph King of our own staff. The exhibition will continue for about a month beginning April 6th. It will constitute a more or less complete survey of the field of Italian engraving from its earliest inception to the time of Marcantonio Raimondi when the technique became so crystalized and stylistic that it consequently lost its spontaneity and interest.

The development of engraving in Italy is usually attributed to the demand by the craftsman for designs and patterns which might be greatly multiplied in this way. The question of its discovery (whether it be German or Italian) is a matter for controversy, although Vasari claimed the honor for his own country-man, Maso Finiguerra (1424-1464), the Florentine niellist and goldsmith. This claim is controverted by our knowledge that engraving was practiced before this date in Italy itself and there are dated prints in the North as early as 1446. Notwithstanding this discussion and the obscurity of its origin it is true that Italian engraving was practically uninfluenced by the northern engraver and his rigidity of style for several decades—a finer feeling for beauty pervades it.

Florence has always been the center of the goldsmith's craft in Italy and we are able to show a tiny niello print made from an engraved silver plate, the work of one of the early Florentine craftsmen. "Niello may be described as the method of treating an engraved silver (or gold) plate by filling the furrows with a black substance (*nigellum*) formed by the fusion of copper, silver, lead and sulphur, which gives the art its name. When burnished the design would appear in black on a bright ground."² Prints made from these incised plates for the purpose of trying out the design were supposed by Vasari to have led to

¹ Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge. A Loan Exhibition of Italian Engraving.

² Hind, A. M. *Short History of Engraving and Etching*. 2nd ed., p. 42.

the discovery of the art of engraving, but this is now disputed and practically disproved for the other art was no doubt known to goldsmiths several centuries before the introduction of engraving. The way of working the niello, however, did undoubtedly influence the technique of the earliest engravers and the "Fine" Manner prints attributed to Finiguerra and his school show this influence.

The Fine Manner was that of most of the early Florentine prints; it is recognizable by the close cross-hatching and is patchy and cloudy in effect. In contradistinction to it is the Broad Manner, a system of shading in which the lines are laid on parallel to each other with a light return stroke between, at an angle, as in pen-drawings. In the comparatively few prints that have come down to us, the latter way of working the plate is first met with in Antonio Pollaiuolla's *Battle of Naked Men*. We hope that Mr. Sachs may loan us his brilliant impression of this extraordinary and rare print of which Mr. Berenson has so forcibly written: "It would be difficult to find more effective illustrations of . . . movement than one or two of Pollaiuolla's own work, which . . . are really masterpieces of life-communicating art. . . . the pleasure we take in these savagely battling forms arises from their power to directly communicate life, to immensely heighten our sense of vitality. . . . The significance of all these muscular strains and pressures is so rendered that we cannot help realizing them."³ This *Battle of Naked Men* is the only known engraving by the Florentine contemporary of Finiguerra.

Of Florence was also Cristofano Robetta (1462—?) whose handling although influenced by the northern Dürer had none of his certainty. Lacking so many desirable qualities his work nevertheless displays certain attractive characteristics that are reminiscent of Botticelli and Filippino Lippi and indeed it is the latter's painting in the Uffizi which he adapted in his *Adoration of the Magi*. Mr. Sachs possesses an impression of this print and in his collection is also the *Allegory of Envy* by the same artist.

The engravings thus far discussed are the work of Florentines and show a technique in its adolescent stage. From the north of Italy but of the same formative period are the *Tarocchi Cards*. The series was twice engraved during the fifteenth

³ Berenson, B. *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*. 3d ed. Putnam, N. Y. pp. 54-55.

century, and the two sets are called the E and the S series, respectively, because of the use of one of these letters on the lowest cycle of each. They compose a pictorial cyclopaedia of Man, Muses, Arts, Virtues and Planets but it is practically established that they are not playing-cards as formerly assumed. There is controversy as to the priority of the sets. Hind ascribes the E to Ferraranese origins and believes it to be the original, while he suggests that drawings of the school of Francesco Cossa might have been employed as designs by Venetian engravers. Clio of the E series is owned by Mr. Sachs but the Boston Museum of Fine Arts possesses the entire E series and also some of the S set. The latter were probably done by some engraver working in the style of the Florentine Fine Manner.

About 1475 Mantua, also a north Italian city, is known to have had a group of engravers working in a style similar to the Florentine Broad Manner. Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) worked here and greatly influenced the others. His drawings were so numerous copied that at one time some twenty-five engravings were thought to be his. This number has been sifted to seven and since these so far excel the rest in quality the others, although after his designs, are now attributed to the School of Mantegna. The accepted engravings are the Virgin and Child,⁴ the two Bacchanals, the two Battles of the Sea-Gods, the horizontal Entombment and the Risen Christ. The first named is reproduced on the cover of this issue of the *Bulletin*. It was formerly in the Brayton Ives and Junius Morgan Collections. The Bacchanalian group with Silenus is from the Von Lenna Collection; the Entombment from the Rechberger, Holloway and Morrison Collections: these together with the Risen Christ are now in the collection of Mr. King. The Bacchanalian Group with a Wine Press and the Battle of the Sea-Gods: the Left Portion of a Frieze are owned by Mr. Sachs.

The Triumph of Caesar: the Senators is attributed to the school of Mantegna and the impression exhibited belongs to the Museum while the Christ Descending into Hell is a loan. Mr. Sachs' collection contains others of this school among which may be mentioned the Scourging of Christ (with the Pavement), the Hercules and Antaeus and the Ignorance and Mercury (both the Upper and the Lower portion). Of this school of course is Zoan Andrea's Four Women Dancing, taken from a

⁴ Carrington, FitzRoy. Engravers and Etchers. p. 140.

drawing for Mantegna's painting Parnassus. This is the most lovely print of all and was given to the Museum by the members of The Print Club. The Risen Christ by Giovanni Antonio da Brescia, copied by him from Mantegna's engraving of the same title (we are showing both) has lost the austerity and some of the dignity as well as the force of line of the original. Notwithstanding these evident weaknesses the Holy Family by da Brescia is an excellent plate. The impression shown is owned locally and was formerly in the Bullard Collection.

Both of the above mentioned men changed their manner later; the dignified simplicity of Mantegna's open linear style was more and more given up by the men of his school, the tendency being toward that of Dürer and the professional German engraver. Nicoletto da Modena (1454 or 1474 —?) in his Adoration of the Shepherds has copied bodily from Schongauer. Benedetto Montagna, son of Bartolommeo Montagna, the painter of Vicenza, also adopted bits of detail from Dürer's predecessors and likewise learned from Dürer a finer system of cross-hatching. It has been suggested that because of their small size Woman and Satyr with Two Cupids and one or two others might very well have been used for book illustrations but there is no evidence of such use. All this shows the development and rounding out of the style of Italian engraving and a gradual loss of the things that seem its chief charm.

The small plate Judith with the Head of Holofernes, exhibited, is the work of Jacopo de' Barbari who was born at Venice between 1440 and 1450. He worked in Germany and is another whose manner partook of both the styles of Germany and those of the South. Most of his prints bear the mark the caduceus. A few other subjects, among which we might mention the St. Catherine, the Sacrifice of Priapus (large plate), Victory Reclining among Trophies and the Sleeping Women with a Snake are in the Sachs Collection.

The Sachs Collection in addition to the above contains other prints of the Northern Italian School. The Calumny of Apelles and the two parts of a frieze forming a Triumph of Neptune, namely: Frieze with Tritons and Nymphs and Frieze with Neptune and Tritons—these three are the production of Girolamo Mocetto whose work shows the influence of Giovanni Bellini but whose general sentiment and style, with his predilection for

hard outline and angular folds place him nearer the school of Vicenza. His Calumny of Apelles and the Judith (not shown) are from drawings by Mantegna.

Domenico Campagnola and Giulio Campagnola (the relationship is not discoverable) both worked on the Shepherds in a Landscape and the unfinished composition by Giulio was completed by the younger man. They worked in Padua and may be spoken of as forerunners of Marcantonio even though Domenico's activity after 1517-18 seems to have been only that of a painter. He engraved the plates of the Descent of the Holy Spirit and the Battle of Naked Men displayed in the exhibition, while Giulio (b. about 1482) whose style was that of Giorgione worked the plates for St. John the Baptist, the Young Shepherd, the Old Shepherd, and Woman Reclining in a Landscape. It was Giulio whom Bartsch regarded as the earliest engraver using the dot or flick. He combined line and flick in most cases but in his splendid John the Baptist the line is used very sparingly. The Christ and the Woman of Samaria, perhaps one of the most wonderfully beautiful of all the engravings of this period, is most purely Giorgionesque.

The Nativity, by the Master I. I. CA. and the Leda and Her Children, by the Master I. B. with the Bird are Bolognese in character but there is nothing to fix the identity of the engravers other than the marks used by them in the few prints extant. Francia Jacopo (1487?-1557), son of the painter Francesco Francia, was a goldsmith, painter and engraver of the northern Italian city of Bologna. Some of his prints are the Five Saints, the Holy Family, Lucretia, Venus and Cupid and Bacchus and his Attendants.

These engravings complete an exhibition made possible only through the generous co-operation of Mr. Sachs whose collection is the most comprehensive in America outside of one or two museums. It furnishes an extraordinary opportunity for the print lovers of Cleveland to study the very rare and almost unprocurable work of the early Italians. The minor Italian artists of the earlier Renaissance, although they never acquired the proficiency in technique of Dürer and some of the northern men, have a charm and allurements that has never been equalled nor even imagined by their hardier fellow-craftsmen of the North. They hold our interest with an indefinable spell that is entirely compelling and unassailable.

W. McC. McK.